

Feb 14, 2025

To: Chair Feldman and members of the Maryland Senate Committee on Education, Energy and the Environment

From: South Baltimore Gateway Partnership, Brad Rogers, Executive Director

Subject: Favorable Testimony for Maryland SB 722 Ecological Restoration

South Baltimore Gateway Partnership submits this testimony in support of Senate Bill 722. The South Baltimore Gateway Partnership was established in 2016 to help implement the South Baltimore Gateway Master Plan, a sweeping plan to improve neighborhoods near the Horseshoe Casino Baltimore, with funding provided by Local Impact Grants generated by video lottery terminals. Under its Strategic Plan, SBGP works to improve the vitality of its communities by focusing on three crucial elements of the South Baltimore Gateway Master Plan: Community Development and Revitalization, Environmental Sustainability, and Health and Wellness. SBGP is not an agency of the City of Baltimore or the State of Maryland. It is governed by a Board of Directors comprised of residents of the district and representatives of businesses located in the district. To learn more, visit www.sbgpartnership.org.

Currently there is an inconsistent understanding of ecological restoration and associated project types. Without this clear definition for ecological restoration across state agencies and with the public, confusion and miscommunication persist over what projects are being included in ecological restoration permitting processes. SB 722 address this confusion by creating a standard definition and allowing more possibilities for restoration to be included in Maryland's planning for resiliency.

Having an official state definition of Ecological Restoration will have direct impact on one of our biggest investments, the Middle Branch Resiliency Initiative (MBRI) to ensure ecological restoration projects keep pace with the urgent threats ecosystems face due to rapid sea-level rise.

The [Middle Branch Resiliency Initiative \(MBRI\)](#) is Maryland's largest coastal resilience initiative, dedicated to restoring 50+ acres of habitat along 11 miles of shoreline. During the development of the [Reimagine Middle Branch Plan](#), communities called for environmental justice including better access to nature and more protection from flooding and storm damage. MBRI supports environmental justice goals by:

- Enhancing South Baltimore communities' resilience and protecting critical infrastructure from coastal flooding, intense storm events, erosion, and sea level rise
- Improving public access to the city's waterfront—including greenspace/water recreation and fishing—by restoring wetland habitat diversity and improving water quality

A unified understanding of ecological restoration will increase collaboration between state and federal partners and leveraging more federal resources for projects in Maryland. These relationships and resources are essential to the success of MBRI.

South Baltimore Gateway Partnership respectfully urges a favorable review of this legislation.

Thank You,

Brad Rogers, Executive Director